

TWO YEARS AT THE FOREFRONT

Exploring the needs and experiences of women-led, women's rights, and LGBTQIA+ led organizations two years into the Ukraine humanitarian response



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SUMMARY

Two years on from the escalation of the war in Ukraine, **Oxfam spoke with a number of people leading work for local and national women-led organizations (WLOs), women's rights organizations (WROs), LGBTQIA+ led organizations, and other local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) addressing the needs of women, girls and gender minorities in Poland and Ukraine.** We wanted to understand how the humanitarian crisis has impacted them, personally and as organizations, and their needs and priorities for the future.

This paper outlines some of the key themes in this current phase of the crisis that emerged from these conversations.¹ It seeks to outline the ways in which the international community, including United Nations (UN) agencies, international NGOs, donors, and other humanitarian actors can better support these organizations – both in the humanitarian response and into the future.

At the beginning of the humanitarian crisis following the escalation of the war in Ukraine, local WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations were some of the first on the ground responding to their communities' needs, both within Ukraine and in neighboring countries, and two years on, **they are still at the forefront of providing assistance.** The ways of working, expertise and knowledge of these organizations is key to an effective, gender-sensitive response, as they are able to represent the needs of women and girls, as well as other marginalized communities; they are trusted actors within their communities; and they respond quickly and flexibly as needs evolve.

Representatives we spoke to from these organizations highlighted **key challenges in continuing to sustain their vital role in responding to humanitarian needs** including deepening burnout, a lack of core funding, and the diversion of resources to meeting the bureaucratic requirements of humanitarian funding.

There is also a need for **greater investment in the voice and agency of these organizations as decision-makers** in the Ukrainian humanitarian response. While humanitarian actors are making progress in including WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations in coordination spaces, we still fall short of meaningful and systemic inclusion, with these organizations identifying continuing barriers to their involvement in decision-making spaces. This lack of meaningful inclusion contributes **continued gaps in the understanding of women's needs** in the context of a humanitarian response where gendered needs and interests are still deprioritized.

In our conversations, it also became clear that WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations **need to be flexibly supported to carry out activities across all stages of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine**, looking to enhance their sustainability within and beyond the immediate response. So far, these organizations have been largely absent from reconstruction and recovery conversations, despite a desire to be involved. They also require more flexible, long-term funding in order to be able to continue not only to respond to the immediate needs of their communities, but also to pursue their core missions of advancing the rights of women, LGBTQIA+ people, and/or other marginalized communities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide adequate support for WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations to sustain their vital role responding to humanitarian needs in Ukraine and Poland.

- Provide core funding to WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations that supports the sustainability of the organization and their work.
- Collect disaggregated data on the amount of funding flowing specifically to WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations in the Ukraine response.
- Identify ways to reduce burnout and support the psychosocial needs of WRO, WLO and LGBTQIA+ organizations' staff and volunteers.
- Reduce the bureaucratic and administrative burden of seeking and obtaining funding for WROs, WLOs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations.

2. Invest in WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations' voice and agency as decision-makers in the Ukrainian response.

- Prioritize the voice of WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations in decision-making, respecting these organizations' expertise as both first responders to the humanitarian crisis and long-standing representatives for the rights of their communities.
- Continue to invite WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations to the table, but also invest in their systemic and meaningful inclusion in decision-making in all aspects of the humanitarian response.
- Effectively consult WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations so that the needs of women of diverse and intersecting identities, as well as gender minorities and other marginalized groups, are not missed.

3. Recognize and support the role that WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations play beyond addressing immediate humanitarian needs.

- Ensure WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations are heard in recovery and reconstruction discussions and beyond.
- Provide flexible, long-term funding that supports the holistic and sustainable work of WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations across all stages of the response.
- Coordinate with international actors within and beyond the humanitarian system to ensure that investment in and engagement with WLOs, WROs and LGBTQIA+ led organizations by international actors is coherent and centers their ways of working.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Email policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

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Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford,
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Photos

Front cover: Nadiya Pavlenko, 75, assesses the damage caused by shelling and bombardments in Novoselivka village, Chernihiv oblast, north of Ukraine. Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam

Page 4: Ludimyla collecting water from Oxfam Water Point in Mykolaiv. Photo: J.B. Russell/Panos Pictures

Page 9: Tetiana Kutas (right), a project manager at The Tenth of April, helps Tamara (left), who is living in a shelter for displaced persons in Mykolaiv oblast, with her papers. Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam.

Page 16: Informative labor orientation meeting held by former Oxfam partner Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor (CDA - Law Center of Advocates) in Moldova in July 2023. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam

Page 23: Greenhouses supported by the Rural Women's Business Network (RWBN) in Odessa. Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam



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